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ABSTRACT

This document presents the text of a speech given by U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Page to the National Press Club September 24, 2003. This booklet also provides a transcript of Secretary Paige's responses to questions asked during the event. The main developments in American education, especially the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act are discussed. (AA)

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Education in America: The Complacency Must End

REMARKS OF
U.S. SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
ROD PAIGE

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

SEPTEMBER 24, 2003

WASHINGTON, D.C.

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When President Bush took office in January 2001, he saw an education system in crisis, unprepared to meet this nation's 21st-century needs. The president saw that the majority of students who pass through our public schools could not read proficiently. And even fewer achieved proficiency in mathematics or science.

Because he believed that the education of our children is our greatest national responsibility, the core of our democracy and the source of our freedom, he made education reform one of his highest priorities.

The president understood that American education needed more than incremental tinkering or small adjustments; it needed major change.

He also understood that the powerful forces of stasis would not allow the needed reform unless the American people themselves rose up and demanded change. Thus, the needed reform would require bipartisan congressional support. What he really wanted was an education revolution.

On his fourth day in office, the president proposed the *No Child Left Behind Act*, and with bipartisan support it became the law of the land. The president wanted emancipation for students and parents and a guarantee of the full promise of our democracy.

Following is a discussion about the reasons why this revolution was necessary and a report on its progress. First, here is some good news. Many of our K–12 schools are the finest in the world, with outstanding teachers, visionary administrators and high-quality resources. Some schools are amazing success stories and make for great news copy, radio actualities and TV interviews. These schools are not always in the suburbs, either. They may be

in Harlem or Helena, West Chicago or East L.A., Charlotte or Charlottesville, Durham or Denver. Many of them are public schools. There is much of which we can be proud.

But that is not the full story. I wish it were. Many schools in this same great country of ours let students leave without teaching them anything. In those schools time passes slowly. Students attend—they sit there—but don't learn. Teachers speak, but the words are often meaningless or they fall on deaf ears.

This atmosphere of disregard confirms the students' suspicion that they have already been written off and that no one really cares if they learn or not. For those passing through these schools, their souls wither as their lives are wasted. In such situations, education most closely resembles a holding action, as students mark time and wait to be thrust out into a competitive job market, armed with few skills and little hope. These students are cheated. They are robbed of the enrichment and empowerment that comes with education. They can never get their elementary or high school years back.

We are facing an unrecognized education crisis in this country. Our wide and sometimes growing achievement gap confirms that there is a two-tiered education system. For the lucky few, their education is the best in the world, virtually ensuring those students have wonderful opportunities for further education, economic security, professional rewards and personal freedom.

For others, there is an underperforming system. Students come to school, but find little education. The vast majority of students left behind are disadvantaged or low-income. Effectively, the education circumstances for these students are not unlike those of a *de facto* system of apartheid. We can document this disparity. Last month, there were many "good news" stories about the national jump in the latest SAT scores. The headlines read: "Student scores

on the SAT rise to all-time high." Yes, this is some welcome news, but if we delve a little deeper, another story unfolds—one that didn't make headlines or copy.

Even as the headlines say, "SAT Scores Rise," closer observation reveals that the scores for African American SAT-takers didn't rise, they remained *flat.* And Hispanic students' scores actually went *down* from previous years. Thus, we celebrate by overlooking disparities, disagreeable conclusions and disadvantaged students.

By the time they reach 12th grade, *only one* in six African Americans and *one* in five Hispanics can read proficiently. Math scores are even worse: only 3 percent of African American and 4 percent of Hispanic students are testing at the proficient level. To put it bluntly, our K–12 system is not serving some kids well. We let these young children sit quietly in the back of class while we celebrate because some of our students are succeeding.

These statistics show that there is an education gap in this country; there is also an education gap with other countries. Internationally, our students are falling behind students in other countries. Two weeks ago, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released a disturbing report. The findings show that American students are being rapidly overtaken by students in many other countries. American students read, write and do math at rates lower than students in Asia and Europe. This is a shocking report, especially because it also documents that we spend more per student than any of the other OECD countries, yet we receive modest results.

Our students are falling behind and there is every indication that, if we allow the guardians of the educational status quo to have their way, we will continue to fall behind. And our nation will be left behind.

The report makes it unarguably clear that if current educational attainments are allowed to continue, underachievement will be a disaster, not only for our students, but for our nation as well. Educational disparities threaten the country itself, our very way of life.

Our nation has prospered and is strong. But the world is not static. The world is moving forward and becoming even more complex and intertwined. Time is speeding us into a race with destiny, into an impending revolution fueled by rapid change, global competitiveness and yet-undefined international relationships. Civilizations rise and fall depending upon the quality of education available. H.G. Wells said, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe." We face an uncertain future.

Unless improvements are made, American students will not be competitive with students in other countries, dooming future generations to less opportunity, greater levels of poverty and further disparities in health status.

The OECD report shows that nearly every European country has made sizeable gains in educational achievement. What this means for the United States is that the rest of the world is catching up to us.

Today, our high school graduation rates fall short of the OECD average. These results highlight an extremely important truth about our public schools: we have become complacent and self-satisfied and often lack the will to do better.

The OECD report shows the urgency of our task at hand: we must improve our public schools before the rest of the world leaves us

behind. Our children and grandchildren's world will be even more complex, interrelated and global. Can anyone earnestly say that our current education system is preparing our future generations for this world?

In the future, only the well-educated will have the necessary skills, insight and imagination to succeed. Those who are unprepared will sit on the sidelines, confronting poverty, dead-end jobs and hopelessness. They will find little choice and much despair. The well-educated will live in a world of their own choosing; the poorly educated will wander in the shadows.

This isn't just about jobs; it is also about quality of life. A sound education gives purpose. It provides companionship and solace. It enriches the mind and spirit.

We cannot deny the benefits of education through shortsighted indifference or lack of will. Nor can we capitulate to the guardians of the status quo. The achievement of all our children must improve, across the board. No child can be left behind.

Education matters to all of us. The ripple effect of underachievement touches all Americans. Our citizens pay a huge economic and social price for undereducated citizens. Welfare rates rise. Poverty increases. Health status diminishes. Tax money is spent to care for those who cannot care for themselves. We find greater strains on Social Security and Medicare and Medicaid. Prices increase to cover rising costs of insurance, job re-training, job-related accidents, disability and poor productivity. Underemployment increases if workers can't hold full-time jobs. Violence, crime, substandard housing, hunger and disintegration of the family are all linked to low educational attainment.

We must be mindful that we live in an interconnected world. What affects one part of one community affects the entire community. We cannot be satisfied if even one child is left behind. We *all* must work together to solve this problem.

This division must end, *not* by lowering the standards for the lucky, but by raising the quality of education for all of our children. We know such an effort can make a difference.

Let me share the remarkable story of Lee Alderman, a transfer student from a private school in Northern Virginia. He transferred by choice, moving to Cardozo High School, a public school in a financially disadvantaged area of the District of Columbia. Lee was a special education student, diagnosed as having autism. His development was slow in the early years. But his mother fought for Lee to get a high-quality education and the school gave him the attention he needed. Lee thrived and achieved great academic success. Two years ago, he graduated as valedictorian. He is now in college on a full academic scholarship. Don't tell me every child can't learn. Every child is a potential Lee Alderman.

So the upside is this: we can provide a high-quality education for all students. The president and the Congress have given us the tools we need to reform American education—the *No Child Left Behind Act.*

In the past few weeks, millions of our children have gone back to their schools. When they crossed the campus threshold, they entered a new era. Yes, many of their same teachers are still there. The buildings are swept and cleaned and they still look the same. Yet, something is different. For the first time in the history of our nation, every state in our nation has an accountability plan that holds all schools and all students in their state to high standards. For the first time in our nation, parents and teachers have the

information they need to work together to make sure no child is left behind. Every child counts.

It may come as a surprise that some schools that get an "A" from their state education agency or that appear on *Newsweek*'s "best schools" list are also on another list: schools that under *No Child Left Behind* are considered "in need of improvement."

Parents more than likely react to this new fact with bewilderment. How can their school be on both lists, they ask. The answer is that some evaluations use group averages, which can hide poorly performing students, while *No Child Left Behind* counts all students.

Parents may even be upset that their school received what they perceive as a scarlet letter because a few subgroups didn't make the grade under the new federal law. And that may make them angry, understandably. But full accountability means telling the entire story and then acting to correct deficits.

No Child Left Behind is a tough law. But it's a good law. It focuses attention on the children who most need our help; but it benefits all children. As a result of *No Child Left Behind*, all across the country, communities are making progress in reforming their schools.

This fall, parents in economically disadvantaged school districts can get information about how well their local school is performing, about its teachers' qualifications, and about whether the school is safe.

Schools and teachers will have detailed information about their students' achievement, so that they can adapt their lessons and better serve *all* their students.

Parents of students attending high-need schools will receive a letter telling them they have options if their child's school hasn't made sufficient progress over the last couple years. And they will find that this year they have more federal funding, the highest federal support in history.

Many of you know this law has its critics. There has been resistance and even stern opposition. We shouldn't be surprised. There are significant, powerful forces entrenched in the old ways, mired in self-interest. They are the old guard—the keepers of the status quo.

Measuring results is a hallmark of the private sector, where management has to be held accountable to shareholders. Yet, for many, this same accountability is unwelcome in education. But we must have it.

We must be held accountable for our results to our stakeholders: students, parents and the taxpayers. There are some who are fighting this change in the classroom, in the faculty lounge, in the school board rooms, in the mayor's office or before the city council. Some are going higher, to the state house and to Capitol Hill.

Some don't believe all children can learn. They say it's silly to have a goal of all children being proficient by 2014. I would ask them what percentage should be our goal? Who will judge which children to leave behind?

Some find their special interests threatened. Some argue we have the right idea, but the wrong approach. Some claim we are underfunding and they will engage in a game of inside-the-Beltway semantics, with talk about "authorizations" and "appropriations" levels.

I understand. Education is a national priority and it is complex and it needs debate.

I welcome analysis of *No Child Left Behind* and the process in place. That's the whole point—we need information and healthy discussion. We will learn from experience. But those who oppose this law simply to fight change are on the failed side of history.

For example, in the last few weeks, some critics have questioned our fiscal commitment. They claim that we simply need to spend more money on the old system. That would be a big mistake. We've already tried spending more money on the system with no measurement of results. That didn't work. In fact, we've tried it for the last three decades.

As a nation, we now spend more than $470 billion dollars a year on K–12 education—more than on defense. My question to the critics is this: what would they purchase with more money? More programs that don't work? More mediocrity? More poor policy and bad administrative decisions?

Don't be duped, it's not that we don't spend enough. We spend enough for better results. We spend more than many other nations and still get poor results.

The time to hide inefficiency or mediocrity is past. If money alone determined quality, then the highest spending school districts should be the best. They often are not. Some of the lowest spending school districts produce the highest student achievement. We need to find more efficient and fair ways to use our fiscal resources.

One of the most controversial education reforms under discussion lately—and one fought the hardest by the guardians of the status

quo—has been opportunity scholarships for the District of Columbia's children. These scholarships would allow some parents to move their children into a school of their choice. These scholarships emancipate both parents and students. They end the tired and self-satisfying monopolistic control of education, by allowing for choice and the pursuit of quality. I was very pleased to see the U.S. House of Representatives approve choice for students in the District of Columbia. I am following the Senate's actions very closely. And I particularly want to applaud the courage of Mayor Tony Williams, Councilman Kevin Chavous and School Board President Peggy Cooper Cafritz, who supported the proposal.

Opportunity scholarships equal school improvement. That's all any of us want. Some think *No Child Left Behind* is a process to "dummy-down" schools. That is not true. It is a process to make each school excellent, to make each school academically successful.

Every parent should welcome this process. Education is an act of trust. Parents expect educators to perform competently and proficiently. They trust that educators know their subject. *No Child Left Behind* provides a guarantee that we are doing everything possible to honor the trust placed in us, to maximize the learning experience for each student and to provide the best possible future for each child.

Some think accountability won't work. They are wrong—of course it will. It is the lack of accountability that has gotten us into this mess. With accountability, schools have a powerful tool to monitor the progress of their students. Tests that evaluate a student's progress are the key to serving them. Once we know what doesn't work, we will fix it. And we will continue to use what is working. It's just common sense.

Some worry that we have placed the emphasis on tests, not teaching. I am surprised by the debate about the need for tests. How else can we measure if students are learning?

Some worry that instruction will center on "teaching to the test." But there is nothing wrong with "teaching to the test," if you are testing something that students need to learn.

Testing allows us to highlight the students who most need our help—so we can give them the help they need. The results of these tests will determine whether schools have made the grade or "Adequate Yearly Progress."

When a school is identified and placed on the "needs improvement" list, resources are targeted to get them back on track. And everyone springs into action. There is no hostile takeover or mass exodus. Rather, schools will have an entire community focused on improving achievement for *all* its students.

No Child Left Behind also puts an emphasis on teaching because we know that teacher quality has a direct effect on student achievement. A good teacher often outweighs the negative effects of all the other challenges a disadvantaged child might shoulder when he or she walks into the classroom. I know many, many teachers who have made extraordinary sacrifices to share the gift of learning. The new law requires that teachers be highly qualified by their state's definition. Again, that's common sense.

We are committed to working in partnership with the states to meet the goal of having a highly qualified teacher in *every* classroom, not just in schools in economically well-off districts.

We know opposition will come precisely because many people fear change itself. They like the habits and consistency of repeating the past, even if repetition means disaster for millions of American students. They fear this revolution.

Let us remember that education is the road out of poverty, it is the best weapon against racism, the best correlate to good health, and vital to the continued growth of our economy.

Forty-one years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke at this podium about the need for greater accountability—a guarantee that all Americans would enjoy a full measure of the promise of the American dream. The Civil Rights Act was a landmark in extending political and economic equality to all Americans.

I believe that *No Child Left Behind* is the logical next step, for it extends educational equality to all Americans. The American Dream begins with, and demands, a meaningful, sound education.

Quality education is a right that must be protected and fulfilled for every child in our country. Such an education is the foundation upon which we will build their future and the future of this great nation.

In the months and years to come, we will travel a long and hard road. Education reform must overcome many hurdles, just as the civil rights struggle encountered barriers and obstacles. But we can—and we will—extend the education franchise to provide a high-quality education to every child.

I find inspiration in the counsel offered by Nelson Mandela. He ends his magnificent autobiography with these words:

> *We have not taken the final step of our journey, but the first step on a longer and more difficult road. ... The true test of our devotion to freedom is just beginning. I have walked that long road to freedom. ... I have taken a moment ... to look back on the distance I have come. ... But I can rest only for a moment ... and I dare not linger, for my walk is not ended.*

Our walk is just beginning. Let's walk together.

Question and Answer Session
Moderated by Tammy Lytle, National Press Club President

Tammy Lytle: It's estimated that the *No Child Left Behind Act* will cost states billions of dollars. Many in Congress who had supported the act now claim that the Bush administration is failing to adequately fund it. Several states are now planning to sue the administration over the unfunded mandates. Why has the administration not sought to provide all available funds under the legislation?

Secretary Rod Paige: I think it's an error to take the premise that the act is not properly funded. In fact, let's put some context here. Public education is a state and local responsibility, but it is a federal interest. And so, therefore, the federal government is providing supplemental resources. It is not the federal government's intention to do the whole system.

In fact, this act has language in it that says that that is not required—that what is not funded is not required.

Further, this act was more generous in its funding than the previous acts. For example, the *Improving America's Schools Act of 1994* also required a certain amount of tests. There was no mention or even discussion at the hearings about paying for these tests. But the *No Child Left Behind Act*, because of the leadership of the president, out of the box had $390 million for our developing of the test.

The funding issue is a bogus argument. It has no basis in fact. And we're growing quite impatient with it.

Ms. Lytle: It's been estimated that anywhere from 50 to 80 percent of schools nationwide won't meet the standards set forth. In fact, Florida recently announced that 90 percent of its schools failed to meet *No Child Left Behind*. Do these numbers surprise you? And what can be done?

Secretary Paige: Schools identified for improvement are identified by the states for improvement. Some states were more aggressive about identifying schools for improvement than others. Florida was very aggressive. They decided to identify a large number of their schools for improvement. They could have done it a different way and had fewer schools. Many states take other decisions. But all states, I think, act in the best interest of their children.

When a school is identified for improvement, it is identified for the purpose of it being improved, so we can direct resources and attention to that particular school. So if a state thinks it can take on a large number of schools, we applaud them rather than feel that they've done something wrong. They've done something great. And we applaud Florida and others.

Ms. Lytle: You mentioned teaching to the test. Do you have any concerns that that will negate some more creative methods of teaching students? And how do you also address other criticisms, such as the fact that schools are cutting music and other programs in order to comply with the act?

Secretary Paige: I'll take the last part first. Cutting music and others arts programs like that is a scapegoat and an alibi. We also know many schools that are simultaneously making achievement in arts as they are toward the standards of the *No Child Left Behind Act* set by their state.

What was the first part of the question?

Ms. Lytle: About teaching to the test.

Secretary Paige: Teaching to the test. The tests that we're talking about are achievement tests. That's different from aptitude tests. The achievement test's purpose is to determine the degree to which students have achieved against the standards that were set by the state. So if you're teaching that content, that's what we want. And that's a completely different situation than teaching to the SAT or to an aptitude test. So teaching to an achievement test is not the problem that many of our objectors would try to get the world to believe.

Ms. Lytle: What about schools that end up cutting teachers in order to meet the requirements?

Secretary Paige: We don't believe that the act requires cutting teachers. We think that all of us are under some financial difficulties now and making difficult financial decisions. But none of these decisions are mandated by the law. In fact, the *No Child Left Behind Act* is a positive law. It is designed to help. It is not designed to do damage to schools.

Ms. Lytle: Is it possible to implement this in the same way everywhere—rural, urban, you name it? And with states having such different standards, such different tests for reading improvement, for instance, do you think that some of the standards, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, that all states should use that if they wish?

Secretary Paige: First of all, doing the implementation of the requirements that each state submit a plan, the people in our

Department think were really great in respecting the differences that the states brought and to build on top of these different systems that the state already had.

The second pillar of the *No Child Left Behind Act* is called flexibility and local control. And so we respect the decisions that they're making at the local level. And the accountability system does not impose a single federal system across the states.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* is better thought of as a collection of different sets of standards by states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. There's no single federal standard.

Ms. Lytle: But how does the Education Department reconcile the fact that many schools that are well-regarded in their states are now deemed failing under *No Child Left Behind*?

Secretary Paige: Okay, first of all, the act never uses the word "failing." But let me mention that we are counting differently. Many systems use averages. Averages can mask failure. Averages can be influenced strongly by a lot of high-achieving students and can hide low-achieving students. And if we identify the entire system based on the average, then we'll disregard a lot of students who need help, and we will be leaving those students behind.

The *No Child Left Behind Act* brings a different way of counting. It says we will not only count some of the students; we'll count all the students. So it's possible to have a system or school that has a high average performance because you've got a lot of great students in it, but you have a lot of students in it who are also not so great, and they're not being paid much attention to. The *No Child Left Behind Act* changes that system, and we pay attention to all students.

Ms. Lytle: Given the reports linking dropout rates and testing in New York and Houston, do you worry at all that *No Child Left Behind* will put pressure on low-performing students to drop out so test scores rise?

Secretary Paige: I'm amused by the logic of our detractors, which says if you hold people to standards, they won't be there. I don't think that's the case at all. I think that we should be concerned about dropouts. We should do all we can to prevent it, and reduce it and work to make sure that all students have an opportunity to achieve.

The two issues are separate issues. They're not linked at all. In order for us to have the type of improvement that we need, we must have standards and we must have accountability. What is the alternative to that—no standards and no accountability? That is what got us where we are now.

Ms. Lytle: In the Houston school district, as I mentioned earlier, the state is investigating fraudulent record keeping. The local dropout rate when you were superintendent there was near zero. What does this say about your leadership of that district?

Secretary Paige: I think the way it was reported says more about the way it was reported than anything else.

The Texas accountability system includes an annual measure of dropouts. In the 2001 submission, some of the schools, 306 schools in Houston, reported data that were inaccurate. Whether this was inaccurate because of some sloppy record keeping or somebody intentionally tried to do things that were incorrect is still being determined and should be investigated. That's why the system should be applauded, because the system found the problem and is working on the problem, and that means the system

works. And it should not be a secret to any profession, where you have a large group of people, that you might find one or two who take a shortcut here and there. The important thing is that you have built into the system the kind of monitoring systems and quality control systems that assure that you can find these things and correct them. And that is what is happening there.

And for a small number of the schools that have fraudulent or errant data to be masked as a system problem in terms of quality across the system I think is patently unfair. There are some hard-working, great people in the Houston Independent School District and in the other system that you mentioned as well, and I think they should be applauded for their hard work rather than loaded down with some difficulties that one or two people might have caused.

Ms. Lytle: Why aren't schools required to reduce dropout rates among minorities in meeting the requirements of *No Child Left Behind*?

Secretary Paige: Say again, please.

Ms. Lytle: Why aren't schools required to reduce dropout rates among minorities in particular to meet *No Child Left Behind*?

Secretary Paige: Well, I don't think that distinction is there. The *No Child Left Behind Act* applies to all students. And the students who are most in need, many who are minorities, get particular attention paid to them.

Ms. Lytle: Are you concerned that cutbacks in education funding in many states will undermine prospects for *No Child Left Behind*?

Secretary Paige: I certainly hope not, because this law, as I indicated in my prepared remarks, is very generous as far as funding is concerned. The amount of dollars is historic.

You know, despite all of the different things that are competing for the federal dollar, like protecting the homeland, like fixing the economy and all those things, the president has been, I think, extremely generous in protecting investment in education. And the dollars in the *No Child Left Behind Act* are sufficient to cause the actions that we want from the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

Are there other issues where dollars may be needed? Possibly. But this act certainly cannot be fairly criticized for not being sufficiently funded.

Ms. Lytle: How are tax cuts good for education? And what do you think will happen to your budget next year?

Secretary Paige: I think our budget next year will do pretty much as it's done in years past, and that is, it will grow in some respects. I hope so. So we're going to be campaigning to make sure that we're adequately funded.

Ms. Lytle: Trumpeter Wynton Marsalis was here on Monday, and he complained that the federal government budgets only one dollar per student on average for education in the arts. Why does your Department give art education such a low priority, this questioner asks.

Secretary Paige: Well, you know, Wynton is a great musician and I enjoy his music, but I'm not sure he's accurate on that particular point. And besides, these decisions about the emphasis on art and other instances would be at the state level and sometimes at the school district level.

We do have some funds that we provide for these kinds of programs, but it is not the federal government's responsibility to have the direct responsibility for funding education in the states. It's a state responsibility. We are interested in supplementing what states do, not replacing what states should do.

Ms. Lytle: Can you comment on the billions of dollars that your Department is not collecting on defaulted student loans? Isn't the American taxpayer the victim of abuse there?

Secretary Paige: Au contraire. I think that our Department should be applauded for the extensive efforts it has put forth and the goals that it has achieved in terms of reducing the number of defaults. There was a press conference just a week ago celebrating the fact that our Department has achieved great things against some tough odds. And I'd supply anybody who needs that information the press releases that we had for last week.

Ms. Lytle: In light of the Supreme Court's decision in the University of Michigan case, do you intend to continue advocating race-neutral alternatives to affirmative action? And what will end the need for such programs?

Secretary Paige: I think the *No Child Left Behind Act* is probably this nation's greatest affirmative action program. And I long for the day when we won't have to require any unusual grading in order to achieve diversity in our great universities.

If we're successful in the *No Child Left Behind Act*, I think universities will be flooded with highly qualified minorities who are competent in all subjects and won't need that type of unusual, I think, discrimination against others. We grew up in south Mississippi, and we were taught that discrimination based on race

was bad. And I've just had a difficult time switching now to say that it's good if this discrimination comes in this direction.

Ms. Lytle: Are high school and college sports teams becoming too powerful? Are they becoming free training camps for professional sports teams?

Secretary Paige: I think fairness would dictate that I say that there are some excesses in sports. But I think, in the main, collegiate sports are properly conducted. At least I would like to hope so, because I think they represent a valuable part of the education experience for young men and for young women.

Ms. Lytle: If more parents use vouchers, what assurances will the public have that the private schools meet high standards?

Secretary Paige: We think parents will stop going there if they don't. We think that that's a problem with public schools. They cannot meet high standards and still receive all the benefits that they would otherwise. There are no consequences for failure. The market pressures with the private schools, I think, will take care of that.

Ms. Lytle: The next question—although Mayor Williams is here, it's definitely not his handwriting on this question.

Secretary Paige: Are you sure?

Ms. Lytle: Yes. What guarantees are there that vouchers for Washington, D.C. will not open the door to nationwide vouchers, in violation of church-state separation?

Secretary Paige: Well, first, I think it's been already established that it's not a violation of church and state. We've had that

argument for some time, and that one should be ended now.

Our education system, I think, in the future, we can see already now, will contain a group of different kinds of delivery systems. There's already homeschooling, which is one of the fastest-growing delivery systems. There's cyber-schooling, which is growing fast as well. You can see springing up all over the country, because of the explosive Internet, cyber-schools making it possible for students to be anywhere and still go to school. Then we have private schools. And we'll have this structure that we now call our public schools.

I think probably, as we look into the future, this structure we call our public schools is always probably going to be the heavy-lifter. And that's why we're fighting so hard to make that work. We think choice and providing opportunities for parents to make these choices will be a necessary condition for effective public schools.

So when I fight for vouchers, I'm doing so for two reasons. One reason is social justice, but another reason is we want to improve the public schools. And that turns out to be the main reason. The simple logic here is, monopolies don't work. We all know this. And I think there's a lot of energy bottled up in public schools that will be freed when we have choice. And you will see these public school administrators become creative and innovative, and it will be a force that this nation is not prepared to see or won't expect to see.

I believe that they can perform on par with any other system. They needn't fear this competition. And besides, we can't duck it. It is going to be here, so we might as well prepare for it.

Ms. Lytle: Given how you're pushing all these higher standards, how can you justify using public funds for charter schools in the

D.C. voucher program that aren't required to meet the assessment standards of *No Child Left Behind*?

Secretary Paige: We have a lot of false assumptions as we look into how we do our public schooling. First place, public education, for example, is embedded in the state constitutions. In the Texas constitution, the words go something like this: every Texas child is due a free and appropriate education at the public expense.

It doesn't dictate a structure. It doesn't say it must be this way or that way. So you can make the case that public education is a concept. It is a free and appropriate education to a student at the expense of the state. And the structure, whether it's what we'd now call the public schools or a voucher school or a charter school is a matter of management and which is the most efficient way to get this free and appropriate education to the students.

So that's my view of the thing.

Ms. Lytle: You talked about not wanting to leave anyone behind. How do you respond to folks who say that, under the adequate yearly progress requirements, special-education students should be exempt? And with the budget deficits that we're facing now, will special education ever be fully funded?

Secretary Paige: When we say no child should be left behind, we also mean special-ed students. So special-ed students must be included, as other students are. The number of students in special education is growing rapidly.

There's one particular category that bothers me a lot, and it's called learning disabled. About 50 percent of the students in special

education are in this category, learning disabled. And I've learned, by reading research from NICHD (the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development), that as much as 70 and possibly 80 percent of students in that category are there because they've never really been effectively taught to read. So I think the number of people in special education will be vastly reduced when our reading program gets much stronger. And so we'll have better funds because we'll have fewer students in special education.

Ms. Lytle: Before I ask the last question, I wanted to present you with a certificate of appreciation for being here and a National Press Club mug.

And the last question is relating to that doctoral thesis on the reaction times of offensive linemen. (Laughter.) How has that helped you in your current job?

Secretary Paige: It's taught me to duck better.

Ms. Lytle: Thank you.

U.S.Department of Education
Rod Paige
Secretary

Office of Public Affairs
John Gibbons
Director

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